

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An arrangement for indicating a status of a target to an entity that attempts to communicate with the target, the arrangement comprising:

at least one sensing device configured to provide sensing information concerning the target's status in response to an action of the target with respect to the sensing device; and

a monitoring device, configured to receive the sensing information from the at least one sensing device, and to govern communication to the entity of the target's status, the status describing at least the target's present and future ability to communicate with the entity.

2. The arrangement of Claim 1, wherein:

the target includes a person;

the status includes an indication of whether the person is present or absent;

a particular sensing device is configured to perform both (A) a primary function that is not related to providing the sensing information, and (B) a secondary function of providing the sensing information; and

the particular sensing device provides the sensing information in response to the person's use of the particular sensing device to perform the particular sensing device's primary function, so that the person does not have to explicitly perform any purely

presence-related action in order to cause the particular sensing device to communicate the sensing information.

3. The arrangement of Claim 2, wherein the particular sensing device is one of a group including:

- a cash register;
- a computer terminal; and
- a time clock.

4. The arrangement of Claim 2, further comprising:

a database, operatively connected to the monitoring device, and configured to store status information concerning the target.

5. The arrangement of Claim 4, wherein the database is configured to store status information from a group including:

- an indication of the person's presence or absence;
- a summary of the person's general work schedule;
- an indication of the employee's title, department or other descriptive data;
- an indication the person's expected date and time of return;
- a description of the nature of the person's absence;
- an indication of an alternative individual that callers might connect with in the employee's absence;

an indication of how the database entry was arrived at; and
a history of recent incoming calls to the employee's extension that have gone unanswered.

6. The arrangement of Claim 1, wherein:
the target includes a person;
the status includes an indication of whether the person is present or absent;
a given sensing device is dedicated to only providing the sensing information to the monitoring device; and
the person must explicitly perform a presence-related action in order to cause the given sensing device to provide the sensing information.

7. The arrangement of Claim 6, wherein the given sensing device is a person-operated device requiring an explicitly presence-related action to be performed by a person in order to provide the sensing information, the person-operated device being from a group including:

a touch-screen;
a push-button; and
a keyboard.

8. The arrangement of Claim 6, wherein the given sensing device is a proximity sensor configured to passively sense a physical presence of the person without the

person's explicit performance of any explicitly presence-related action, the proximity sensor being from a group including:

- an infrared detector;
- an optical detector; and
- a weight detector.

9. The arrangement of Claim 1, wherein the monitoring device includes:

a qualifying portion configured to consult an index that associates entity identifiers with an authorization level of corresponding entities, and to qualify the communication of the target's status to the entity based on the indicated authorization level of the entity.

10. A method of indicating a status of a target to an entity that attempts to communicate with the target, the method comprising:

automatically providing sensing information concerning the target's status in response to an action of the target with respect to a sensing device; and

based on the sensing information from the at least one sensing device, governing communication to the entity of the target's status, the status describing at least the target's present and future ability to communicate with the entity.

11. The method of Claim 10, wherein:

the target includes a person;

the status includes an indication of whether the person is present or absent;

a particular sensing device is configured to perform both (A) a primary function that is not related to providing the sensing information, and (B) a secondary function of providing the sensing information; and

the providing step includes providing the sensing information in response to the person's use of the particular sensing device to perform the particular sensing device's primary function, so that the person does not have to explicitly perform any purely presence-related action in order to cause the particular sensing device to communicate the sensing information.

12. The method of Claim 10, wherein:

the target includes a person;

the status includes an indication of whether the person is present or absent;

a given sensing device is dedicated to only providing the sensing information to the monitoring device; and

the providing step includes providing the sensing information in response to an explicitly presence-related action that the person must perform in order to cause the given sensing device to provide the sensing information.

13. The method of Claim 10, further comprising:

accumulating sensing information to form status data that is stored in a database;

and

using the status data from the database to govern communication of the target's status to the entity.

14. The method of Claim 10, further comprising:

consulting an index that associates entity identifiers with an authorization level of corresponding entities; and

qualifying the communication of the target's status to the entity based on the indicated authorization level of the entity.

15. A computer program product including computer executable code or computer executable instructions that, when executed, causes a computer to perform the governing step of Claim 10.

16. A computer program product including computer executable code or computer executable instructions that, when executed, causes a computer to perform the governing step of Claim 11.

17. A computer program product including computer executable code or computer executable instructions that, when executed, causes a computer to perform the governing step of Claim 12.

18. A system configured to perform the method of Claim 10.

19. A system configured to perform the method of Claim 11.

20. A system configured to perform the method of Claim 12.